



'AMR B. LAYṬ

'AMR B. LAYṬ ṢAFFĀRĪ, military commander and second ruler of the Saffarid dynasty of Sīstān (r. 265-87/879-900). Though of humble birth, the four Saffarid brothers from the Sīstān countryside were able to further their military ambitions by joining the 'ayyār bands that had originally arisen there to combat the local Ḳawāreġ sectaries. While Ya'qūb b. Layṭ was building up in Afghanistan and eastern and southern Persia the mightiest empire yet to arise out of the disintegrating 'Abbasid caliphate, 'Amr fought at his side and in 261/875 became governor of Herat, which had been seized from the Tahirids in 253/867. Ya'qūb died in Fārs in 265/879, and the Saffarid army eventually acclaimed 'Amr as his successor. He continued the fiction of submission to the 'Abbasid caliphs and acting merely as their governor, even though this stance had become increasingly unrealistic, since Ya'qūb had taken over Kermān and Fārs and had marched into Iraq, to be halted at Dayr al- 'Āqūl only fifty miles from Baghdad itself. The caliph Mo'tamed had perforce to invest 'Amr with the governorship of Khorasan, Fārs, Isfahan, Sīstān, Kermān, and Sind, and, according to the *Tārīk-eSīstān*, of Gorgān and Ṭabarestān as well, in return for a tribute of a million dirhams per year; 'Amr was also able to appoint his supporter 'Obaydallāh b. 'Abdallāh b. Ṭāher, of the Tahirid family but at odds with his kinsmen, as his *ṣāḥeb al-ṣorṭa* or police chief in Baghdad.

'Amr regained Fārs by 268/881-82, but the struggle to reestablish control over Khorasan took several years. During Ya'qūb's last year, when he had been preoccupied with events in Fārs and Iraq, the province of Khorasan, originally wrested from Moḥammad b. Ṭāher in 239/873, had been taken over by local



contenders for power, in particular the former Tahirid general Aḥmad b. ‘Abdallāh Ḳoḷestānī. After Ḳoḷestānī was killed by one of his own guards in 268/882, Saffarid authority was reestablished in Nīšāpūr and as far west as Isfahan, from where we possess Saffarid coins minted in 269/882-83. Another adventurer, Rāfe‘ b. Harṭama, took over the remnants of Ḳoḷestānī’s forces; a complex three-cornered struggle ensued over the next decade for control in Khorasan, involving ‘Amr, Rāfe‘, and a further slave commander, Abū Ṭalḥa Maṣṣūr. The contenders made various alliances among themselves, and on different occasions enjoyed support from the dispossessed Moḥammad b. Ṭāher and the caliph. In 271/885 the regent Mowaffaq assembled the pilgrims of Khorasan in Baghdad and had ‘Amr publicly cursed; the caliphal occupation with the Zanj revolt had ended in 270/883, and attacks could now be launched against the Saffarids in Fārs. ‘Amr suffered a severe defeat in 273/886, being driven back to the borders of Sīstān, but he reestablished his position in Kermān. Threats from the Tulunids and the Byzantines inclined Mowaffaq towards peace, and in 275/888-89 ‘Amr’s governorships in Khorasan, Fārs, and Kermān were temporarily restored in return for ten million dirhams’ tribute. Even so, the rebel Rāfe‘ b. Harṭama could not be dislodged from Khorasan until he began publicly to support the ‘Alids of the Caspian provinces, thereby forfeiting Sunni and caliphal support. With the ostensible moral backing of the caliph, ‘Amr was at last able in 283/896 to defeat Rāfe‘, who was shortly afterwards killed in Ḳvārazm. ‘Amr was now at the zenith of his power; the caliph further granted him Ray, and it seems that Saffarid suzerainty was at this time established across the shores of the Persian Gulf in ‘Omān. But ‘Amr’s overweening ambition now brought about his fall. He endeavored to extend his power into Ḳvārazm, and this inevitably meant a clash with the Samanid Amir Esmā‘īl b. Aḥmad, who claimed control there. A battle was fought near Balk in 287/900, in which ‘Amr was defeated by Esmā‘īl. Although technically Esmā‘īl had been in rebellion against the caliph, and ‘Amr the enforcer of caliphal rights, the caliph can not have been sorry to see the overmighty Saffarid humbled; at all events, the captured ‘Amr was sent by Esmā‘īl to Baghdad as a prisoner, and in 289/902 Mo‘tamed had him executed. The Samanids took over Khorasan, and within a decade or so of ‘Amr’s deposition, the military empire of the Saffarids fell apart, with the power of the later Saffarids confined largely to the heartland of Sīstān.

Like his brother a bold skilful military commander, ‘Amr built up the Saffarid army around a core of Turkish slave *ḡolāms* and made it into a powerful fighting force. Neẓām-al-molk states that ‘Amr was in fact better liked by the



people than his brother Ya'qūb, and the local historian of Khorasan Sallāmī, in his *Tārīk wolāt Korāsān* as quoted by Ebn Kallekān, praises 'Amr's genius for military organization and financial administration. Sunni sources such as the Arab historians display scorn and distrust towards the parvenu Saffarids, overthrowers of the aristocratic Tahirids, but we can discern from the local *Tārīk-e Sīstān* that the Saffarids were popular in their homeland, a fact that shows local resentment at outside control and financial exploitation by the preceding Arab governors of Sīstān. Some modern Persian historians have seen in Ya'qūb and 'Amr early protagonists of Persian national feeling. It is undoubtedly true that the two brothers played some role in stimulating the birth of New Persian literature in the later 3rd/9th century; thus we find the court poet Moḥammad b. Waṣīf celebrating in verse 'Amr's pacification of Khorasan after Rāfe's death.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

The history of 'Amr's reign must be culled from the general Arabic and Persian chronicles, such as those of Ṭabarī, Mas'ūdī, Gardīzī, and Ebn al-Aṭīr, and from the local histories such as the *Tārīk-e Boḡārā* of Naršaḳī (for the warfare between 'Amr and the Samanids), the *Tārīk-e Sīstān*, and the *Eḫyā' al-molūk* of Shah Ḥosayn b. Malek Gīāṭ-al-dīn. 'Amr figures in several anecdotes of Persian *adab* literature, in works such as Neẓām-al-molk's *Sīāsāt-nāma*, Neẓāmī 'Arūzī Samarqandī's *Čahār maqāla*, and 'Awfī's *Jawāme' al-ḥekāyāt*; there is also relevant information in Ebn Kallekān's article on Ya'qūb b. Layṭ (Beirut, VI, pp. 402ff., no. 828).

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